The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HIGHWAY TRUST FUND EXTENSION

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I cannot express how frustrated I am with Washington politics, as a result of, I believe, irresponsible behavior on the part of Democrats and Republicans, in the House and in the Senate. The Federal Highway Administration shut its doors on Monday, furloughing 2,000 employees, putting projects across the country at risk and stopping the highway program from paying States the money they are owed.

I have been in constant communication with Gary Ridley, Oklahoma's transportation secretary—I think the best one in the country. He flew here this week to help resolve this crisis. He told me if it is not worked out by Friday, there will be very serious consequences in my State of Oklahoma. There will be jobs that will be shut down, work that has already been contracted out that will be under default. I understand some of the Democrats are trying to make political hay out of this, but I want to set the record straight that a lone Republican Senator is being singled out for the blame, but in reality there is plenty of blame to go around.

Last week the Senate passed a jobs bill that included a number of tax cuts and long-term extension for the highway program. The House Democrats were divided on the bill and their leadership could not pass the bill. Given the chaos in their caucus, they passed a 30-day extension of the highway bill late last week. Because of this 30-day extension, it would add about $10 billion to the outrageous $13.2 trillion national debt.

A Republican Senator said he would only agree to it if it was offset. Senate Democrats refused to offset the package. Nobody was willing to back down. We find ourselves in this situation today.

Not only is there ample blame to go around on why Congress allowed the highway program and the FHWA to shut down, I think there is equal blame to go around on why it has taken us 6 months to pass a long-term extension.

We tried on numerous occasions to pass the extension. Frankly, this should not come as a surprise to anyone. I have been sounding the alarm for this ever since last July. We learned in July that there are a couple of Senators who are, frankly, opposed to the Federal Highway Program and want to see it underfunded, as has been the case this fiscal year.

I often said—there is no secret to this, even though I am considered to be quite a conservative—in some areas I

have been a big spender. One is national defense. The other is infrastructure. That is what we are supposed to be doing here.

On the last day of the fiscal year before the 2005 highway bill expired, Senator BOXER and I, right here on the floor, attempted to pass a long-term extension of the highway program. Unfortunately, we were not successful. The same group of Senators who opposed the highway program demanded that the bill be offset. They suggested unobligated stimulus funds, but the Democrats objected to this. The chairman, that is BARBARA BOXER, and I were working hard to find offset. Senator BOXER got Democratic leadership to agree to use TARP as an offset.

I was very excited about this. I remember I thought that night—it was a Wednesday night, it was getting close to midnight. We had to do something or everything was going to fall apart. I thought we had it resolved. Unfortunately, many Republicans and some Democratic Senators object to this offset. As a result, we were stuck with a 30-day extension on the continuing resolution which funded the program at $1 billion a month more than 2009 levels.

I have to say—and I now blame Republicans for this—I have often said one of the bad things that happened to this Senate happened on October 1 of 2008, when they passed the $700 billion bank bailout bill. That is the TARP funds we are talking about. A lot of conservative Republicans objected to offsetting the TARP because that would be an admission that that money probably was not going to be repaid anyway. I think a lot of Republicans were trying to tell people back home—I didn't vote for this, by the way, but they did. Those who did—don't worry, everything is going to get paid back. It is all going to get paid back. I think we all should have known better. All you had to do was read that bill and that would have been the case.

So then it was the Republicans who refused to use that. The money was there. It could have been used and we wouldn't be facing this dilemma. We could have the 1-year loan extension. We would have time to put together a highway program, which is what we—we—want to do.

Unfortunately, some do not. So it is clear the only way to get a long-term highway extension done is for Senator REID to dedicate a week of floor time to overcome the objections of two or three Republicans who opposed the highway program. To that end, all the chairmen and ranking members of the committees involved sent a bipartisan letter to Senator REID pointing out the problem we were facing and asking for floor time to overcome the objections. Senator REID ignored this request until 2 weeks ago when he abandoned the bipartisan Baucus-Grassley jobs bill in favor of his own bill that included a long-term highway extension. I wish to point out that this maneuver cost the highway extension the bulk of Republican support.

I wish to caution that it is very dangerous to turn a bipartisan issue such as this into a partisan one. Because the highway bill was included with a number of other issues, it got caught up in the House Democratic and second stimulus bill politics unrelated to the highway program. This just reinforces that it should have been done as a stand-alone measure.

Let me conclude by reading an excerpt of a Tulsa World editorial—that is Tulsa, my hometown. It states:

What's up with those geniuses in Congress? First they scurry around to get massive stimulus funding in the pipeline in an effort to quickly jump-start the economy, and then they fiddle around and let regular transportation funding that would further aid the recovery lapse. Not a good recipe for ensuring that the recovery will continue.

The editorial concludes:

Inhofe blamed the funding snafu on politics, which comes as no surprise. Apparently it was just too much to ask of our leaders to put politics aside for once in favor of rescuing the economy and thousands of jobs.

Let me tell you that editorial was from October of last year. It is amazing that Congress has allowed the months to go by since that time.

Right now, what we are facing in my State of Oklahoma is about $415 million a week that is going to cost us. We have contracts that are already let, and we are in a dilemma now to know what to do. We are going to have to resolve this problem by, I would say, Thursday or Friday or it is going to be chaotic. I suggest it is not just my State of Oklahoma that has this problem; many other States do. I hope people set everything aside and try to get this thing done and do one of the things we are elected to do and do something about the infrastructure. Right now, it is in crisis. We are going to have to resolve it.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TEMPORARY EXTENSION ACT OF 2010

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to Calendar No. 278, H.R. 4691, a 30-day extension of provisions that expired Sunday, February 28; that the Bunning amendment regarding offset, which is at the desk, be the only amendment in order; that there be 60 minutes for debate with respect to the amendment, with the time equally divided and controlled between Senators REID and BUNNING or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the time until 8:30 p.m. be for debate with respect to the bill, with the